

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1956

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Education

**Title:** An act relating to educational assessments.

**Brief Description:** Requiring civics assessments.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Upthegrove, Lantz, Quall and Santos.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Education: 2/21/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Requires students in one grade each of elementary, middle, and high school to take a classroom-based civics assessment.
- Defines social studies as including history, geography, civics, economics, and social studies skills.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Shabro and Tom.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; and Curtis.

**Staff:** Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

**Background:**

Students in elementary, middle, and high school are required to learn the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALR's) in social studies, among other subjects. Social studies includes history, geography, economics, civics and social studies skills. By the 2008-09 school year, school districts must have assessments or other strategies in place to make sure that their students have had an opportunity to learn the EALR's in social studies. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is in the process of developing and piloting classroom-based assessments in the different subjects included in social studies.

By law, students must study the state and federal Constitutions before graduating from the state's public or private schools. In addition, public schools are required to have flag exercises in each class at the start of the day, observe Temperance and Good Citizenship Day on January 16, and provide educational activities in observance of Veteran's Day.

The OSPI reports that its social studies assessments "mirror best practices and borrow heavily from successful statewide programs, such as We The People, Project Citizen, History Day, and Model United Nations. The OSPI's hope and belief is that students who engage in these authentic tasks throughout their K-12 careers will leave high school ready to be engaged, informed citizens, regardless of their professional track or future socioeconomic status."

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

Beginning with the 2006-07 school year, students in the fourth or fifth, seventh or eighth, and 11th or 12th grades will complete a classroom-based assessment in civics. The assessment must be approved by the OSPI. School districts will submit a verification report to OSPI documenting the districts' use of the classroom-based assessments in civics. Social studies is defined as including history, geography, civics, economics and social studies skills.

### **Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

Removes references to including the assessment results in school records or on student transcripts. Requires districts to submit verification reports beginning two years early. Clarifies the grades in which the assessment may be given and removes the assessment from the list of state assessments. Finally, it defines social studies to include history, geography, civics, economics and social studies skills.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available. New fiscal note requested on March 2, 2005.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** (In support of the original bill) "A nation of sheep begets a government of wolves." Today's young people will be tomorrow's leaders and voters, so it is essential to the preservation of democracy that these young citizens become informed voters and active participants in the civic lives of their communities. But many students and young adults don't fully understand or appreciate the need for personal civic engagement. Voter participation is lowest amongst citizens aged 18 to 25. In addition, a recent survey of students indicated that many don't understand or appreciate the first amendment protections of the press and free speech. One of the ways that the state can promote the civic understanding of young people is to have students take one of the classroom-based civics assessments pilot tested and approved by the OSPI.

(With concerns on the original bill) It will be expensive and technically challenging to meet the requirement that the results of the assessment be included in student records and, for high school students, noted on the students' transcripts. The grades in which the assessment will be given need to be clarified.

**Testimony Against:** (Opposed to original bill) While civics is one of a number of very important subjects that students need to learn, for now the state needs to limit its testing requirements to the subjects currently assessed on the WASL. Schools are working hard to improve student learning and the state needs to keep its focus on those content areas and refrain from putting additional pressure on teachers and students.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support of original bill) Representative Upthegrove, prime sponsor; Susan Mielke, Washington Roundtable; Shane Hamlin, Office of the Secretary of State; Rowland Thompson, Allied Daily Newspapers; and Sean Keller, citizen.

(With concerns on original bill) Kate Lykins Brown, State Board of Education; Robert Butts and Caleb Perkins, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Gary King, Washington Education Association.

(Opposed to original bill) Don Rash, Association of Washington School Principals.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.